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Bi-216

FEB. 17.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEYHINTS ON THE CARE OF RACCOONS.**SURROUNDINGS:**

The raccoon is a woodland animal and provision should be made for giving it plenty of shade in summer. A deciduous tree in each yard would be an excellent arrangement. A generous supply of pure water is essential and in selecting a site for yards this point should not be overlooked.

YARDS:

A yard and a shelter should be provided for each female. The yard should not be smaller than 12 by 20 feet. It may be constructed of boards standing on end, but wire netting, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch mesh and No. 15 gauge, allows a better circulation of air. The fence should be about 6 feet high and extend into the ground about 3 feet. At the bottom, it should be bent horizontally inward a foot to turn the animals in case they try to dig out. At the top of the fence it is necessary to have an overhang of boards or sheet iron extending horizontally inward about a foot and a half. There should be a similar overhang outward if dogs or other marauders are likely to give trouble.

SHELTERS:

The shelter, or den, may be a double-walled kennel, warmly built, inside the yard; or if several animals are to be kept, it may be a building divided into compartments, each connected with a yard outside. Often an existing building, as a barn or shed, can be utilized as a shelter, the yards being adjacent to it. One successful breeder of raccoons shelters them in box stalls in his barn, and gives them the run of netting enclosures outside. An important point is to have warm, comfortable quarters for the animals.

FOOD:

Raccoons are practically omnivorous. They relish and thrive on table scraps as raw or cooked meat, cooked vegetables, mush or bread, and milk. They are especially fond of green corn in the roasting-ear stage. Clean dishes and plenty of fresh water are very essential. One meal a day given each evening is sufficient for adults, but young animals should be fed at least twice, evening and morning.

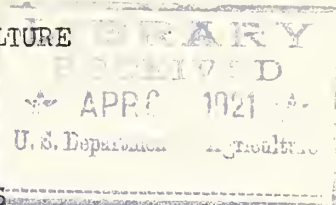
In northern localities raccoons normally hibernate for two or three months in winter, and during that time require no food. They should be allowed to become fat in fall, preparatory to their long sleep. When cold, stormy weather sets in, feeding should be suspended until spring, lest the animals be tempted to abandon their normal habit of hibernating.

BREEDING:

One male is sufficient for several females. By throwing open the doors between 3 or 4 adjoining pens, that number of females can have the company of a male nearly up to the time the young are expected. Before the young are born each female should be confined to her own quarters. The number of young in a litter varies from one to six, the average being about four. When not in service, males usually may be allowed to run together in a yard by themselves, but it is advisable to have a separate nest box for each animal.

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BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY



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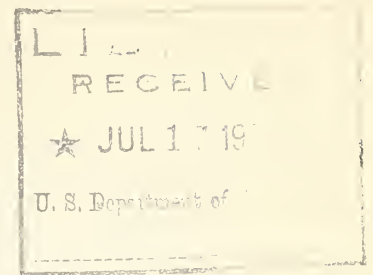
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RAISING RACCOONS

SELECTING A RANCH SITE:

A well-drained suburban or farm property with a generous supply of fresh drinking water offers a suitable site on which to raise raccoons. Plenty of shade and some sunlight are essential to the health of the animals. They are great climbers, and to furnish them a means of exercise trees are sometimes permitted to stand in their pens.

PENS AND DENS:

Raccoons behave well in captivity and are more easily handled than most other fur animals. Pens 24 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 6 feet high, similar to those for foxes, are satisfactory for raccoons. (See Department Bulletin No. 1151-D, "Silver-Fox Farming," which may be had free on request to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.). When there are no trees in the pen it is best that the sides and top be completely covered with woven-wire netting, 16-gauge, $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch mesh. The wire may extend into the ground 6 inches, or an 18-inch wire carpet may be fastened to the side walls and ends to prevent digging out. Instead of completely covering the top of the pen, an overhang of galvanized iron 2 feet wide can be constructed around the top. Trees allowed to remain in the pens should be far enough away from the side walls to prevent the raccoons from climbing over and escaping.

Dens with removable nest-boxes, such as those recommended for foxes, are well adapted for raccoons. These should be placed outside the pen just as with foxes, for pens and dens are more easily cleaned and kept clean under this system than if the den is placed inside the pen. Various types of dens and pens have proved successful. Important points to keep in mind in constructing dens are the comfort of the animals and the ease with which the dens can be kept clean by the caretaker. Pens will remain clean much longer if constructed on ground that is covered with grass.

FEEDING:

Raccoons relish and thrive on a variety of foods. They are fond of all kinds of dried bread mixed with milk, and will readily consume mushes made of cereals to which milk has been added. Cooked meats and meat scraps, in combination with cooked cereals, make a good feed, and sweet fruits are very tempting to the animals.

Raccoons require more food than do foxes. They are heavy feeders and should be given liberal rations. Adults may be fed once daily, preferably late in the afternoon. Females with young and young raccoons should be fed twice daily, morning and evening. In the north, during November, before the coldest months of the year, the animals must be given more food than in any other month to prepare them for their hibernation.

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If they come out of the den during the hibernation period food should be given to them. The same good judgment required in feeding other fur animals is necessary with raccoons. The only water necessary is that supplied for drinking, and plenty should be provided for that purpose. Food and water vessels should be kept scrupulously clean at all times.

BREEDING:

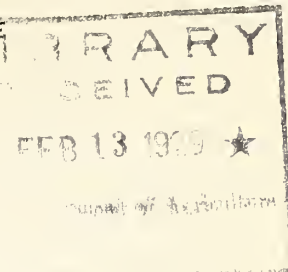
As a rule, only those raccoons possessing the darkest pelts should be selected for breeding stock. A strain of black raccoons has been developed by selective breeding, and breedings seem to be reasonably true to type. Raccoons have one heat period and one breeding season each year. They are polygamous, and one male can serve two or more females. When not kept in one pen the male and the females should be put together about the middle of November. They sometimes breed late in January, but more frequently in February. The period of gestation is approximately 63 days, and litters of one to six young will arrive in March, April, and May. Litters of six are common, but four is about the average number. Raccoons will breed and produce young in their first year, but the litters are generally smaller than those produced by more mature animals.

MANAGEMENT:

The methods of feeding and breeding raccoons are similar to those described in the bulletin on fox raising above referred to. It is best to separate the males from the females about the first of March, for the female is capable of looking after her young without aid. She should be fed liberally a few days after the young are born. The young may be left with her until they are well grown and eating freely, at which time they may be placed in a separate pen.

Raccoons should never be given anything but clean wholesome food. In the coldest weather it is not necessary to feed them during their hibernation period of three weeks or a month. It is well to look into the nest-box a few days after the young are born to see how they are getting along, and to remove any dead ones.

Raccoons can be moved from one place to another by means of a catching box or a cage constructed for that purpose.



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